

Franklin County CTC looking to lead state in secondary Career and Technical Education

Franklin County Public Schools Superintendent Chrissy Jones has one main goal for the district's Career and Technical Center (CTC): to be the best in the state.

And with a new facility, an innovative blend of programs and an experienced staff, she feels that goal is very obtainable.

Students began this school year in a new facility complete with updated state-of-the-art labs and classrooms, including those for Information Technology and Health Science programs and welding, carpentry and automotive technology. The facility also includes a whole STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) wing for the pre-engineering program.



Franklin County Public Schools Superintendent Chrissy Jones stands in front of the newly remodeled Career and Technical Center.

Jones said the new building was needed as almost 40 percent of all district high school students attend the CTC.

"We were operating in a facility that was built in the 60s and, in trying to improve and expand the programs, we basically outgrew that building," she said. "We needed a building that would service the needs of the 21st century."



Automotive technology students are learning many tasks from putting transmissions together to making bio-diesel fuel.

Jones said the local board of education agreed with the need to update the old building and the new structure was literally built around it.

Recognizing the importance of such a facility is the first step in creating a strong presence of Career and Technical Education (CTE) in any district, said Dale Winkler, associate commissioner at the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and executive director of the Office of Career and Technical Education.

"We need superintendents to recognize the importance of CTE in their districts," he said. "This is a critical step in the effort to increase college and career readiness percentages across the state as well as implement recommendations set forth in a report issued by the

Southern Regional Education Board on how to make Kentucky CTE a world class system.”

Jones said CTE programs, in general, are a great way for students to explore their interests especially if they realize it’s something they would like to do as a career. It gives them a head start before they go into a postsecondary institution, she said.



Students work on a computer in the Information Technology program.

“If they get into those programs and find out they love it, I want them to have the skills and possibly college level credits so that when they leave as seniors, they can go directly into a postsecondary option or if they choose to go into the workforce, they have the skills to get a job in that area,” Jones added.

She also said it’s time to recognize that there are many postsecondary avenues, including two- year programs, apprenticeships and certification programs as well as a traditional four-year college track.

“I don’t think that we should target every student to go to a four year university or college,” she said. “A lot of kids can do two years and, for some, it may do them good to work for a couple of years and decide exactly what they want to do; see the value of working and then

Jones also feels it is important to expose students to CTE at an earlier age. That is one reason the pre-engineering curriculum Project Lead the Way is in both of the district’s middle schools and all 8th-grade students get a chance to tour the CTC each year.

Getting deeper into the Career Clusters is something Jones feels is something that needs to be “honed in on” during these middle school years and even before.

Getting to world class status

The Franklin County CTC already has a lot working in its favor as Kentucky strives to elevate its CTE sector. Jones wants to lead that effort and plans to do so by expanding the programs at the school by way of collaboration with other mainstream programs.



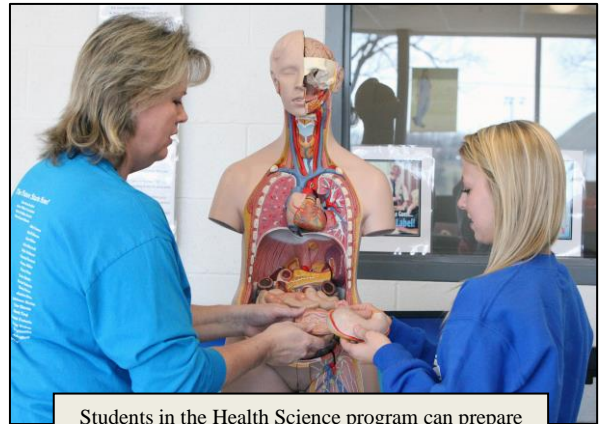
Pre-engineering students use computer programs to design a number of projects including buildings.

“My hope is to expand and have a mathematics and English teacher there who will also work with the CTE areas to integrate those programs and show students the connection between

subjects such as mathematics and the CTE classes,” she said. “We are taking the time to really plan it and give it a solid foundation.”

Jones added that the more students can connect education and real life, the more they will retain what they are learning.

One of the problems many career centers have is that of keeping students for longer periods of time. Jones said she would like to get to half-days with every student that attends the CTC giving them the option to participate in extracurricular programs at their home high school while providing more time in their CTE programs.



Students in the Health Science program can prepare for a number of careers in the healthcare field.

In addition to utilizing collaboration and integration between core academic and CTE programs, Jones would also like to retain more students into their career pathways, steering them in the right direction should they choose a program that isn't a good fit.

“When I look at how many students we retain in our pathways, we are not where I want to be. Part of that could be that students have explored and said they are not interested in that subject but they are not choosing another pathway,” she said. “We need to see what other options are available in steering that student to something else.”

Jones hopes doing things like bringing in mathematics and English and expanding offerings at the CTC will help in keeping those students at the CTC longer and aid in making them completers in their chosen pathway.



A modern, state-of-the-art welding lab enables students to learn a high demand skills trade at the high school level.

In expanding programs, Jones said it's important to see what is needed in the local workforce first before adding programs.

“We have a lot of options but we as educators need to expand our thinking and not just do what we've always done,” she said. “CTE has gone through an evolution over the past 10 years and I think we need to continue that and not be satisfied with where we are. That's why I want to be one of the top ten if not the best!”